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IN INDIA

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LITERATURE AND AUTHORSHIP IN INDIA

by

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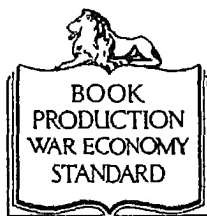
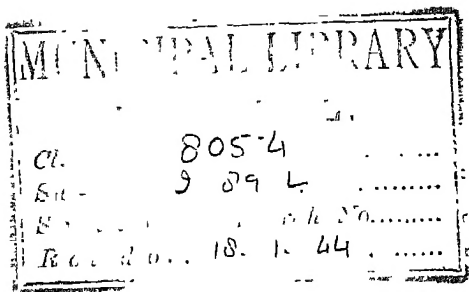
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With an introduction by

E. M. FORSTER

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Founder, The P.E.N. All-India Centre

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The author of this book is a member of the P.E.N., but the opinions expressed in it are his personal views and are not necessarily those of any other member.

INTRODUCTION

AFTER two hundred years of political connection with India, we in England know next to nothing about the Indian cultures. Our ignorance is disgraceful and is indeed an indictment of our Empire. We have sent out soldiers and administrators and money-makers to the East, but few scholars, and fewer artists. And we have given no adequate welcome over here to the Indian scholars and artists who might have interpreted to us the feelings of their people, and its ways of expressing its feelings. When Indians are very rich or very obstreperous, we pay attention to them; when they are merely sensitive they get ignored.

Now, it is unwise to ignore sensitiveness: you may win the short battle by so doing but you will lose the long one and will be condemned by the tribunal of history. It is unwise to suppose that culture is unimportant and that distance in space and differences in idiom are a sufficient excuse for superciliousness and obtuseness. Our record here is poor. What attempt has been made by our rulers to promote Oriental scholarship and carry on the tradition of Sir William Jones? What attempt have they made to familiarize Britishers with the Indian arts and literatures or with Indian music? The answer to such a question is "Wembley"; those who remember Wembley will know what the answer means, and those who have forgotten Wembley are to be congratulated. The little that has been accomplished in the way of interpretation has been done by individuals, or by private bodies. A couple of years ago the Warburg Institute organized a photographic exhibition of Hindu temples, and their intensity and profundity

was a revelation. And to-day this little book of Professor Srinivasa Iyengar will be another such revelation, for it takes us into the almost unknown subject of contemporary Indian writing. Professor Iyengar does for India what Mr. Hsiao Ch'ien, in his "Etching of a Tormented Age," has lately done for China; he puts his country on the receptive Englishman's map.

Professor Iyengar is well qualified for his task, for he understands our mentality; he is, by the way, the author of a well-informed essay on Lytton Strachey which shows that he keeps in touch with developments over here. He understands our limitations, also. He knows that we shall have no knowledge of any Indian vernacular, and that we may easily be confused by a whirl of Indian names. So he divides his little treatise into short well-defined chapters, writes clearly, and links up wherever possible with matters familiar to us. He puts before us the early and rather promising impact of western culture upon the East, and traces its unexpected reverberations down to the present day, when "India can neither do with English nor without it." He speaks of the 19th century and of the Brahmo-Somaj. He speaks with enthusiasm and generosity of the 20th century Bengali Renaissance, and shows its connection with similar movements in other parts of the peninsula. And he leaves us aware that something is in progress behind the mouthings of the politicians and the rustling of the newspapers, something which without him we should not detect. He is a wise guide, too. For instance, he is against purism, and, as a convinced impurist myself, I should like to thank him for this. And I should like to thank him generally for lightening our darkness, and for showing us something of the complexity and richness of the coming day.

E. M. FORSTER.

CHAPTER I

FACILE foreign writers and interested propagandists are never tired of declaring that India is not a nation at all but merely a vast subcontinent. Indeed, they say, it is about as big as the whole of Europe, with Russia only excluded. Within its boundaries, again, about one hundred and eighty languages and thrice as many dialects are spoken. The scripts used, too, are bafflingly various; and, while some write from left to right, others disconcertingly reverse the direction! There is no need to go on in this strain: we know well enough the puzzling features of India and of the Indian literary scene.

Yes, it is all true, but it is not the whole truth; it is actually the lesser part of the truth. India may be really a huge country, but *geographically and culturally she is one*; India may speak a multitude of different tongues, but her heart is sound and her soul is one. The fact of Indian unity is a positive faith with most Indians, and it does not require any logical or material corroboration from statistician or propagandist. However, the existence of these divers languages and scripts does make the task of the student or the historian of the Indian literatures extremely difficult, even if not absolutely impossible. Ordinarily, an educated Indian is familiar only with his own mother-tongue; less often, he knows Sanskrit or Persian, and occasionally English as well; only very rarely can he claim acquaintance with even four or five out of the many Indian languages.

This is not, of course, very surprising; if Europe were considered an entity, the position would be the same. An average

European would be knowing his own mother-tongue; he would probably have some knowledge of Greek or Latin or both; and, in rare cases, he would know besides an additional European language or two. But the modern European is luckier than his Indian contemporary in one or two important respects. If an Englishman wants to learn something about a foreign literature, say Russian, he can acquire a considerable measure of at least second-hand knowledge through competent histories of Russian literature in English and through any number of adequate English translations of Russian authors. Mirsky and Baring on the one hand and the Maudes and Mrs. Garnett on the other would help the eager Englishman to gain a fair degree of intimacy with the treasures of Russian literature.

In India conditions are very different. There are no reliable or comprehensive histories of most of the Indian literatures, even in the respective Indian languages. If there are hardly any good histories of Tamil literature in that very language, it goes without saying that there are in Tamil *no* histories of other Indian literatures at all. This is generally true of the other regional Indian literatures as well. Since the average reader is most imperfectly acquainted even with his own literature, he has no chance whatever of gaining an insight into the movements in letters in the other linguistic areas. Similarly, translations from one Indian language into another are a rare (and a quite recent) phenomenon. Occasionally an article appears in English about the literary achievements of some Indian literature or other; more occasionally, a book devoted to Kannada or to Bengali or to Urdu is offered to the public: but, being written in English, these do not reach the majority of literatures. The mental *purdah* is consequently not lifted. With the best will in the world, the average educated

Indian is unable to exchange pulse-beats with the poets and the dramatists and the novelists who write in those Indian languages that are not his own.

The writer of an essay on Literature and Authorship in India is thus faced with an almost impossible task. He can at best have a first-hand knowledge of his own mother-tongue, a nodding acquaintance with a few more Indian regional languages and, perhaps, a scholar's love for a classical language like Sanskrit or Persian as well. He cannot hope to plumb the depths, in any real sense, of even one of the major Indian literatures: Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu or Urdu. Some of these, Tamil and its sister Dravidian languages, are not even of Indo-Germanic origin. The etymology and the syntax, the script and the history—these vary from language to language. It is certain, therefore, that one who wishes to write a comprehensive and truly authoritative study of the subject will very soon realize that the thing simply cannot be done.

And yet an essay on Literature and Authorship in India is worth attempting, however partial and meagre one's knowledge may be and however unsatisfactory one's execution may prove. I do not pretend to be an authority on the subject: on the contrary! I shall restrict my inquiry to the "modern" period, extending, roughly speaking, from 1800 to the present day. I shall try merely to survey the contemporary Indian literary scene, to discuss some of the forces that have shaped and are shaping the modern Indian literatures, and to offer a speculation, for what it may be worth, on future possibilities.

It is inevitable that, in a rapid sketch like this, some of the generalizations should prove far too sweeping. Readers are sure to enumerate exceptions, to advance counter-arguments

and to elaborate extenuating circumstances. These would not necessarily destroy the validity of the general picture. Moreover, it is undesirable that an essay like this should be overloaded with circumstantial detail: in the hackneyed metaphor, the wood should not be lost in the trees. It is, therefore, necessary that only a few outstanding or historically important works or authors should be mentioned. It need not be deduced from this that those are the only prominent men of letters in modern India or that I intend any slur on the books and the authors—so many of them—not referred to in it. Their exclusion is determined by the exigencies of space and also by the severely limited scope of the present essay.

Of the various books and magazines that have proved useful in the preparation of this essay, one deserves special mention, viz., *The Indian P.E.N.* Its pages have proved a veritable mine of useful information relating to the various Indian literatures, even minor ones like Rajasthani, Kashmiri, Konkani, Halbi and Balochi, and the classical languages like Sanskrit, Pali and Ardhamagadhi. I venture the opinion that the old files of *The Indian P.E.N.* will be cherished as invaluable reference works in the years to come. For the rest, I must add that many of the opinions expressed in the course of the essay, except in reference to Tamil or to Indo-Anglican literature, are second-hand even when the sources are not clearly indicated.

CHAPTER II

AN impartial study of Indian history reveals the fact that, broadly speaking, India went through a "dark age" during the century following the death of the Emperor Aurangazeb in 1707. The splendours of the Moghal rule were over: the agitations and the aspirations of the British era had not yet begun. The old world was certainly dead, but the new world was as yet a dim speck on the horizon. The Mughals and the Marathas, the British and the French, the many petty chieftains scattered over the country, these were fighting among themselves almost continuously till, a century later, by a process of convenient elimination, the British at last found themselves masters of the situation. But this period of transition, with its perpetual oscillations between peace and war, *exhausted the country and reduced it to a "waste land."*

Although the various Indian languages flourished in the country before the eighteenth century, they were rarely used for the higher intellectual purposes. Proverbs and gnomic sayings, adaptations from the Sanskrit epics and *puranas*, religious musings and outpourings, ballads and folk-songs, these were no doubt there. But when it was a question of writing a treatise on philosophy or ethics or science, the Hindu thinkers turned to Sanskrit as a matter of course. Sankara, Ramanuja, Vidyaranya, Venkatanatha, Appayya Dikshita and several others wrote in Sanskrit, not in their respective mother-tongues. Likewise, the Mussalmans wrote often in Persian or in Arabic. The scholars, apparently, and not unreasonably, thought that by writing in Sanskrit or in Persian or in Arabic they could appeal to a much wider and more intellectual audience than if they wrote in Tamil or in Kannada or in Urdu. This is

the reason why very little efficient prose was written in the popular languages even after they had demonstrated their connotative possibilities and their phonetic resilience in innumerable poetical works.

What, then, was the condition of literature and authorship in India when Britain had more or less established her Indian Empire? The sacred literatures of the Hindus, handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth, were under an eclipse; many palm-leaf manuscripts were in hiding in unsuspected corners of old monasteries; some were kept alive through the endeavours of Pundits who could repeat by rote whole epics from one end to the other. Accretions and interpolations were fast corrupting the literatures of the Hindus and even those of the Mussalmans. Meanwhile, men were still writing anæmic verse in the courts of the petty princelings who lived their uneasy hour during the troubled eighteenth century; but, lacking vitality, these literary effusions lacked at once intimacy with life and hope for the future. The voice of poesy rustled like dead leaves in autumn, with the premonition of unescapable winter rather than with the unquenchable, life-giving hope of approaching spring.

Fortunately for India and her literatures, the right type of Englishman, whether he worked in India or dreamt of her from afar, did not commit the blunder of looking upon Indians as creatures of an inferior civilization and of their literatures as worthless abracadabra. Although Edmund Burke was wrong in his conclusions about Warren Hastings, he nobly sounded the right note when he exclaimed: "God forbid we should pass judgement on a people who framed their laws and institutions prior to our insect origin of yesterday." Hastings himself, while he painfully reacted to the base metal that he struck in his environment again and again, was not

without admiration for the pure gold of Indian culture, and he cherished an especial love for the *Bhagavad Gita*.

It is an astonishing fact in Indian history that invader after invader has overrun the country only to be himself conquered and assimilated in the end. You drop a lump of sugar into a well; ripples are caused, the sugar dissolves in the water, and there is peace again. You now drop a handful of salt or something else soluble; you repeat the operation any number of times; but the water dissolves everything you throw into it, the ripples of strife scarcely reach beyond the moment, and harmony reigns once more. The water is the same, and yet it is all the time subtly changing as well; the lumps of sugar and of salt violently but vainly try to break the challenging unity, they are soon lost in the solvent that triumphs every time. Thus it has been with India. The country has always managed to swallow up the invader. Aryan and Dravidian, Hindu and Mussalman, the country has forced them, in spite of themselves, to achieve a synthesis of culture that, in its changing manifestations, has revealed clearly enough the continuing thread of India's cultural unity.

The last and most recent assault came from Europe. Traders and missionaries crossed over to India in large numbers, the former to help themselves and the latter to save the souls of the Indians. When the missionaries first looked into some of the Indian scriptures, they were rather taken aback. A people who could produce the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the six systems of philosophy, the various commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, surely these were not mere pagans, groping helplessly in the utter darkness of their spiritual ignorance! The deeper the inquiring Westerner delved into the treasures of Indian culture, the more astounded he became; sometimes he altogether lost himself in his Oriental studies. At any rate,

he learnt to look upon the cultured Indian more as a kindred soul and less as a member of a subject nation.

While thus the finer type of European agreeably responded to the best in Indian culture, the Indian likewise was not very slow to learn something from his Western partner in the co-operative adventure that human culture finally is. The Western impact on India had been spasmodic and indeterminate at first; in her easy-going manner India had let the West get mixed up in her affairs. Soon India became the battleground for the European powers. The tremors of the strife presently reached the remotest corners of this subcontinent. The British were victorious at last; they were firmly in the saddle now. And, in the comparative tranquillity that followed, India began rationalizing her reactions to the Western impact and turning them to fruitful use. There was nothing for India to do except repeat what she had so often done in the past: she must swallow up the invader wholesale, digest him completely! The Aryans and the Afghans, the Jews and the Syrian Christians, the Parsis and the Mughals, all had been assimilated entire: could not the same thing be done in regard to a few thousands of Britishers?

Yes, it could be done, and partly it was done. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of the Englishmen did eat and dress like Indians, keep Indian mistresses and beget coffee-coloured children; occasionally they even contracted marriages with Indian women. But the latter-day Englishman cultivated an extraordinary habit which nothing will now make him give up. He had no belief in the sage advice that when you are in Rome you must behave as the Romans do. The Englishman, on the contrary, insisted on being an Englishman even in India; he brought with him his golf and his cricket and his insularity; he flatly refused to mix with the Indians as

his more adventurous predecessors had done. Perhaps a day may still come, sooner perhaps than we realize, when even the Englishman in India will be proud to be an Indian, making India his permanent home.

CHAPTER III

SOON after the British were released from their pressing military preoccupations in India, they started thinking, however tardily and however half-heartedly, about the general welfare of the vast country committed to their charge. It required no astuteness to see the appalling state of ignorance that then universally prevailed. At first the British administrators could do little: either they minded only what they considered to be their main business of governing the country or they found themselves, with all their sympathy and earnestness, devoid of any spontaneous interest in Hindu or Oriental culture and learning. All that the general run of eighteenth-century Britishers in India could do was to make occasional grants to indigenous institutions engaged in the teaching of Sanskrit or of Persian. Warren Hastings went a step further; he founded the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 and endowed it liberally.

Meanwhile, in an auspicious hour, Sir William Jones landed in India. "With an acquaintance, more or less intimate, with no less than twenty-eight languages, with a range of interests that embraced most subjects from music to mathematics, and with the intuition of a born poet, he was admirably fitted to reveal the glories of Hindu civilization not only to Europeans but to Indians themselves."¹ The year after his arrival in

¹ Wingfield-Stratford, *History of British Civilization*, p. 961.

India, Sir William founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal; and for the next ten years he was uninterruptedly active, saving and interpreting the treasures of Sanskrit literature for the benefit of India and the world. In the meantime Jonathan Duncan had started the Sanskrit College at Benares. Other European scholars too were likewise lured by the East; and towering Orientalists like Henry Colebrooke, Charles Wilkins, Horace Wilson and their innumerable modern successors have now laid India under a heavy debt of gratitude. But it is necessary to remember that it was Sir William Jones that nobly led the way through the then dense jungle of Sanskrit scholarship so that others could more easily follow him and recapture again and again his own Pisgah vision of felicity.

There was no doubt at all, thought Jones, that India's literary past had been a singularly distinguished one: the present, however, was a different matter. Ignorance, apathy, superstition, these alone held the field. The Englishman in India and the enlightened Indian alike posed the same question: Was India to adopt a wholly Westernized system of education with English as the medium of instruction? Or was she merely to revive the study of Sanskrit and Persian, and to organize general education with the various modern Indian languages as media?

Charles Grant, one of the Directors of the East India Company, urged, towards the close of the eighteenth century, the immediate introduction of a wholly Western type of education in India. The Court of Directors, however, thought the step premature and hence nothing was done. In 1813 the British Parliament took the initiative by ordering the East India Company to devote one lakh of rupees for "the revival and improvement of literature, the encouragement of the learned people of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a

knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India." However, a controversy soon arose regarding the connotation of the term "knowledge of the sciences" and anyhow, the sum of one lakh of rupees was rightly considered to be too meagre to attempt the manifold tasks imposed by Parliament. Things therefore pathetically drifted for another twenty years.

It was about this time that the dawn of the Indian renaissance was heralded in Bengal, and men came forward to assert India's right to fan her rekindled life into a clear and gem-like flame. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Prince Dwarakanath Tagore and their Brahmo friends had tasted in abundance the fruits of Western culture and literature, and they inevitably contrasted the West at its best with the marsh vapours of decadent Indian civilization. The young idealists were seized by a spirit of intolerance and thorough-going reform. They felt convinced that only out of the consumption of the prevalent rubbish-heap by the fire of a new culture could a new civilization emerge. Action more than meditation, science more than the humanities, language as a medium of vigorous expression and not as a play-ground for grammatical gymnastics, education to fit one for citizenship and a profession and not to isolate one from the bulk of one's countrymen—these were some of the main objectives pursued by Ram Mohan Roy and his friends. The solution they suggested and helped in some measure to realize in practice was a system of Western education with English as the medium of instruction.

In his endeavours, Ram Mohan Roy found unexpected allies in two Englishmen, David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde East. In due course, the Hindu College was founded in Calcutta; in 1835, hardly twenty years after it had been inaugurated, it had as many as four hundred pupils on its roll. In Bombay

and in Madras, however, people with the dynamic energy of Ram Mohan Roy were wanting, and hence these and other Indian provinces were content then—as to some extent they are content even now—to follow in the footsteps of emotional, agitated, ever-experimenting Bengal.

Another factor that determined the direction of Indian education was the advent and the wide-spread activities of the Christian missionaries. The ultimate aim of the missionaries in India has ever been proselytization: in this it cannot be said that they have succeeded to any appreciable extent. But they have done pioneering and extensive work in India in the fields of education and of social service. The Serampore College was founded in 1818 by Carey, Ward and Marshman, and it is even to-day a very useful institution. Other missionary schools and colleges were started before long all over India. English was generally the medium of teaching in these missionary institutions and Western curricula and methods were more or less imported wholesale to make Christian liberal education possible.

Besides imparting general education, the missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, undertook auxiliary tasks as well. They set up efficient printing-presses in the different parts of the country; they learnt the several languages and translated the Bible into them for popular consumption; they studied the various Indian literatures with scientific thoroughness and they published in English useful books on the Indian languages and literatures. Some of these presses—the Wesley Mission Press at Mysore, the Basel Mission Press at Mangalore and the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, to name only three—remain to this day up-to-date and active agencies for the dissemination of knowledge.

Indeed, enthusiastic missionaries had attempted even earlier

to produce creative literature in the Indian languages. Father Thomas Stephens's Marathi-Konkani epic, *The Christian Purana*, and Father Constantius Beschi's Tamil epic, *Them-bavani*, are among the most astonishing things that the missionaries have done in India. Nevertheless, it is not as creative writers that the missionaries will be remembered by the Indians of the future. In the words of Margaret Macnicol, "Very little, if any, of their writings in the vernacular will rank as literature, but they gave an impetus to the scientific study of the vernaculars as a literary vehicle that was of immense service to those who were destined to use it in verse or prose later on."¹ This latter they did by publishing Grammars, Dictionaries, Graduated Readers and Manuals of Prosody along the lines of similar Western publications. Kittel's Kannada Dictionary, Gundert's Malayalam Dictionary, Bronson's Assamese Dictionary, Caldwell's *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages*, these and many like publications by missionaries and other scholars like Lewis Rice, E. P. Rice, Brown, Cotter, Nicol Macnicol, and F. E. Keay (to name only a few) did the spade-work that is a necessary preliminary to a literary renaissance.

CHAPTER IV

THE new intellectuals and the zealous missionaries were, no doubt, very eager to give Indian education a scientific bent and a European atmosphere. But it is more than probable that without the timely intervention of Macaulay's clinch-

¹ *Poems by Indian Women* (The Heritage of India Series, The Association Press, Calcutta), p. 21.

As for the Indian newspapers, all was not well with them either. The appalling illiteracy of the people made it impossible for the papers to command a wide circulation. Moreover, Indians could only very slowly be induced to cultivate the reading habit. Means of communication were scanty and the circulation of papers was limited to a few towns and cities. No wonder the newspapers lived—as many of them live even now—a precarious existence: infant mortality among them has always been a staggering phenomenon in India.

Further, Indians were in the beginning seriously handicapped in having to write their editorials and other articles in English, that being, after all, an alien language. But they were equally at a loss, at any rate in the earlier decades of Indian journalism, in having to write in their own mother-tongues on political and other subjects of current interest. They had ceaselessly to experiment with indigenous prose, borrowing freely from English and coining words from Sanskrit and Persian, thus gradually evolving a weapon that could be used as effectively in the controversy as in exegesis, in narration as in description. In the process, Indian idioms crept into English compositions and English syntax often twisted the anatomy of prose in the Indian languages. But, nothing daunted, the pioneers bravely carried on, regardless of failures and disappointments.

It is not necessary here to refer in detail to subsequent experiments with the educational system in India. The Wood Despatch of 1854 led to the institution three years later of the Universities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. From time to time other educational reforms have been tried, and these have led to a progressive widening of the base and an expansion of the scope of Indian education. But the central problem remains: mass illiteracy persists and English maintains its

stranglehold on the entire educational machinery of India. It seems as though India has reached a stage when she can neither do with English nor do without it. The question of a common national language for India bristles with so many difficulties that the distracted educationist and patriot are often compelled to throw up their hands in despair and cry like Viola :

“Time! thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie.”

CHAPTER V

EDUCATION, through the medium of English, has doubtless been responsible for several evils in our midst. On the other hand, English education has also played an important part in India's political and cultural renaissance. Lipping the language of Burke and of Mill, of Shelley and of Swinburne, it was inevitable that educated Indians should dream of the political emancipation of their Motherland. It was inevitable, too, that young men fresh from the new educational institutions should have visions of a literary renaissance inspired by the West. The province of Bengal, the first to come completely under British domination, was also the first to cherish these fond aspirations and to plunge headlong into the ardours, the ecstasies and the agitations of creative life.

The Bengali writers of the mid-nineteenth century knew only too well that by attempting to master an utterly alien language they would be largely frittering away their energies. Yet it had to be done; they, the pioneers, had to make them-

selves heard by their English masters. The point of view of these early writers, not merely in Bengal but in other parts of India as well, was thus explained by Babu Sambhunath Mukerji in the course of a letter to Meredith Townshend: "We might have created one of the finest literatures in the world without making any impression in the camp of our British rulers and, of course, without advancing our political or even social status. . . . Hence we are compelled to journalism and authorship in a foreign tongue, to make English a kind of second vernacular to us, if possible. You have no idea of the enormous personal sacrifice involved in this. . . . But we, who write in English, have to make this sacrifice for the fatherland."¹

There was another reason also that compelled publicists and others to write in English. If one wrote in Bengali, one would be read and appreciated only by the people of Bengal; but if one wrote in English, one was likely to make an appeal to the intelligentsia of the whole country. Besides being the sole channel of communication with the outer world, English had come, almost imperceptibly, to occupy the dignified position of an inter-provincial language. The educated Indian thus willy-nilly wrote in English, conversed in English and orated in English; and the all-India journals and inter-provincial gatherings were conducted in English.

It must, however, be said that to the eternal credit of Bengal her sons did not allow their artificially stimulated enthusiasm for English to obscure their abiding love for their own mother-tongue. The great Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the cornerstone of the Indian renaissance, early turned away from the seductive blandishments of English to consecrate himself solely to the service of Bengali literature. His novels fused into a

¹ Quoted by N. C. Kelkar in *The Mahratta* (February, 1901)

flame of radiant achievement the romanticism of Sir Walter Scott and the perfervid emotionalism of renascent Bengal. In the apposite words of Professor Priyaranjan Sen, Bankim Chandra "awakened the country to the greater world outside, and linked the two together. The East and West met in him."¹ His novels, *Anand Mutt*, *The Poison Tree*, *Krishna-kanta's Will* and the rest, translated into the other Indian languages, quickened their creative pulse and laid the foundations of modern Indian fiction.

Journalist and novelist, critic and reformer, Bankim Chandra was something of an all-rounder in Bengali literature. And yet to-day he is a national hero mainly because of the song, *Bande Mataram*, which he included in his *Anand Mutt*. For twenty-five years the song was no more than a little item in one of Bankim Chandra's fourteen novels; ten years passed after his death; then, in 1905, "came the partition of Bengal and then this song leapt into sudden, glorious life, electrifying the frenzied, harrowed feelings of Bengal by its exalted adoration of the Motherland, the exquisite beauty of the language and expression, the intensity of devotion and the purifying and elevating influence on the mind and the spirit. And from Bengal the song and the words passed all over India as a living unifying force, the rallying call of nationalism."² Ever since, despite recent opposition to it from certain quarters, *Bande Mataram* has been occupying the exalted status of an unofficial national anthem for India.

Although scholars like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar had prepared the way, it was Bankim Chandra who, by his organizing genius, blazed the trail of the Bengali renaissance. Others, many of them, followed him and carried aloft the

¹ *The Indian P.E.N.* (July, 1938).

² Nagendranath Gupta.

torch that he had lighted. Romesh Chunder Dutt, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Prabhat Kumar Mukerji, Sarat Chandra Chatterji, and, above all, Rabindranath Tagore, these and many others—poets, novelists, dramatists, essayists, critics—these have won for Bengali a high place among the literatures of the world.

The derivative element in modern Bengali literature may largely be traced to the influence of Western, and especially of English, literature. If Bankim Chandra benefited by a study of Scott and the Romantics, Michael Madhusudhan equally drank deep at the Pierian Spring of Western poetry, in particular Dante's *Divina Commedia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Tagore himself was a lifelong admirer of romantics like Goethe, Shelley and Keats. Bengali poets have also taken over and exploited verse patterns like the sonnet, the ode and blank-verse itself with its vast possibilities.

This is not the place to attempt an assessment of the achievements of Rabindranath Tagore. He is not of Bengal, or even of India only, but of the world. As a writer of lyrics, Rabindranath's achievement is probably without a parallel in the whole range of world literature. Bankim Chandra's was the glorious promise of spring, Rabindranath's the sumptuous richness of autumnal fruition. After Rabindranath appeared on the literary scene, modern India could once again boldly and proudly look the civilized world in the face. "He has knocked at our gate and all the bars have given way. Our doors have burst open." It only remains for us to gather the harvest while we may.

Bengali poetry is seemingly a phenomenon of inexhaustible richness and variety. One who has long lived in it and breathed its rare perfume thus describes his reactions to it: "As one surveys Bengali poetry and recalls its best pieces and

one's impressions of the sights and sounds and thoughts that cling to one's memory, one thinks of the jasmine and the lotus; the moon-beam and sandal-paste; the dark waters of the Jumna; the tinkling of the anklets, the music of the bangles, and the sound of the flute; the cuckoo and the peacock; withered leaves and languorous evenings; garlands and groups of girls with their pitchers near the well; the hospitable cottage and the genuine welcome awaiting the visitor. The more recent notes are those of squalor and grinding poverty, of hopes unrealized and prospects blighted. Now and then divine philosophy brings comfort and solace; but the sounds of distress and need persist. The total impression is that of a gentle, kindly, sweet voice sounding strains now of gladness, now of languor, now of thoughtful laughter, rarely long or boisterous, and never forgetful of the high mission of literature."¹ Remembering that this is the opinion of one whose mother-tongue is Maithili, and not Bengali, we may take it as an accurate description of the treasure-house of modern Bengali poetry.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the literary renaissance in Bengal was well under way, the movement gradually spread to other provinces in India. Writers in Northern, Western and Southern India freely responded to the Western impact as well as to the counter-blast from Bengal. In the United Provinces, the Hindi novels of Shrinivas Das and Premchand, the poems of Sita

Professor Amaranatha Jha in *The Modern Review* (April, 1941).

Ram and Shridhar Phatak, and several works of drama and of criticism clearly betrayed this double influence. Similarly, the influence of English literature is traceable in the Urdu novels of Sharar, in the lyrics of Hali and Azad, and in other literary compositions of various kinds.

There was, moreover, the solitary phenomenon of the late Sir Muhammed Iqbal, an authentic poet who sang eloquently and inspiringly in Urdu no less than in Persian. He was something of a Melchizedek in modern Indian letters, instinctively drawing upon the reservoirs of the tradition of the Orient: and he was almost suspicious of the West and the superficial glamour of some of its institutions. His was a dedicated life, dedicated to the clear light of truth, and he died a happy warrior, leaving an unblemished record behind him.

Gujarati literature followed close upon the heels of the Bengali and the Hindi renaissance. Narasimharao Divatia, Kavi Nahnalal, Narmad, Gandhiji, K. M. Munshi, and many younger writers have made the Gujarati literary renaissance a living and fascinating reality. Between them they cover almost the entire gamut of human experience, and hence Gujarat to-day is on the threshold of great achievements in the literary field. The versatility of present-day Gujarati literature is indicated in these exhortatory words of Professor B. K. Thakore: "Let me advise ~~you~~ to read Nahnalal for idealism, Munshi for vigour and vivacity, Gandhiji for faith and hope, and Govardhanram for a sympathetic understanding of our variegated land and people."¹

Nor must it be forgotten that the Parsis, who have made Gujarati their own, have contributed their significant share to the Gujarati renaissance. It was a Parsi, Fardunji Marzban, who founded in 1822 the first Indian paper in Gujarati; his

¹ *Triwani* (September, 1938.)

grandson Jehangir, was a short-story writer of considerable repute; another adventurous Parsi, Behramji Malabari, was an accomplished writer not only of Gujarati verse but also of English verse and prose. But easily the most outstanding of Parsi poets is Ardeshir Khabardar, who is happily with us still: "The poet has ripened, in the beauty of his verse as well as in the richness and the depth of his thought, during the years that have passed since his first work appeared . . . he has had his sorrows and tribulations and through them all he has never wavered for a moment in his belief that somehow good results out of evil."¹ Khabardar's poetry is therefore an excellent antidote to the tormented unrest and defeatism of our times.

As for Marathi literature, it has had a long tradition reaching back to the thirteenth century, when the great Dnyaneshwar lived, or even earlier. The political ferment towards the close of the last century harnessed the extraordinary literary talents of patriots like Bal Gangadhar Tilak to the service of Marathi journalism. Tilak's paper, *Kesari*, became the organ voice of militant nationalism and found its way into every cultured home in Maharashtra. His distinguished *chela*, Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar, has also made meritorious contributions to Marathi literature. Dramatist, critic, journalist, biographer, historian, poet, short-story writer, Kelkar's fecundity and versatility have been amazing. He is to-day rightly considered the doyen of Marathi men of letters.

Another outstanding Marathi writer, Hari Narayan Apte, aided Indian, and particularly Maratha history as a fruitful hunting-ground for his widely popular historical novels. He judiciously imported into Marathi literature some of the methods of prominent English novelists like Scott, Dickens

¹ Irach J. S. Taraporowala in *The Indian P.E.N.* (December, 1940).

and Thackeray. Among other outstanding Marathi writers of yesterday and to-day, mention may be made here of S. K. Kolhatkar of Nagpur, Chandrasekhar Gore of Baroda, and the two well-known poets, Madhav Julian and Yeshwant. Popular magazines like *Kirloskar* and serious periodicals like *Sahyadri* are bringing frequently to light more and more writers of promise. But only the future can tell how many of these will translate this promise into positive achievement.

Of the other modern Indian literatures, Assamese and Oriya have had chequered careers. It was only in 1882 that Assamese was restored to its lawful place in the law courts and educational institutions of Assam. Since the pioneer efforts of Anandram Phukan and Laxminath Bezboroa in the mid-nineteenth century, Assamese men of letters have been making creditable contributions to enrich their literature in various ways. Novels, social plays, farces, patriotic songs, short stories, *belles lettres*, all these are produced by present-day Assamese writers.¹

Oriya literature, in spite of its achievements in the distant past, went through a period of decline and obscurity which lasted till very recent times. The fact that the Oriyas were divided between two or three British provinces proved a great obstacle to the renaissance in Oriya. The institution of Orissa as a separate province by the Government of India Act of 1935 has instilled "a new inspiration in the minds of the Oriyas, who are now trying their utmost to regain the lost glories of their past."² It is, however, worthy of note that even during the period of decline there were Oriyan writers of the stamp of Fakir Mohan Senapati and Radhanath Roy who early heralded the new Oriyan literary renaissance.

¹ Birinchi Kumar Barua, *Assamese Literature*, pp. 55-57.

² A. P. Panda in *The Indian P.E.N.* (December, 1938).

There is not space here to enumerate the representative figures in other North Indian literatures. Modern Sindhi had a pioneer in Dayaram Gidumal; and to-day there is considerable literary activity in that language. Bhai Kahan Singh and Professor Mohan Singh seem to have made promising contributions to Punjabi literature, which is slowly emerging into importance. The cultured world is sure to hear more and more of these literatures in the years to come.

CHAPTER VII

THE Dravidian group now remains to be noticed. Of the four literatures that constitute this group, Tamil is undoubtedly the most ancient, dating back to a period when it flourished contemporaneously with classical or even Vedic Sanskrit literature. It was during the nineteenth century that, thanks to the labours of men like Ellis, Mackenzie, Subbaraya Chettiyar and above all of Mahamahopadhyaya U. V. Swaminatha Aiyar, many classics were collected, collated and given to the general public. It was in the nineteenth century, too, that Tamil prose made its first experiments. Poetry in the traditional style was also being written by scholars like Ramalinga Swamigal and Minakshisundaram Pillai. Towards the close of the century, Tamil fiction and Tamil drama were first attempted: Rajam Aiyar's novel, *Kamalambal Charitram*, and Sundarum Pillai's poetic drama, *Manonmaniyam*, are important landmarks, both historically and on account of their intrinsic worth. Other writers associated with this early period of the Tamil renaissance were Vedanayakam Pillai, Madhaviah and Govindaswami Rao.

With the turn of the century, new writers and new *genres* appeared on the scene. Subramanya Bharati, unquestionably the greatest single figure in the Tamil renaissance, wrote prose and poetry of a variegated richness and beauty. Sambanda Mudaliar published popular plays by the dozen, often audaciously putting old English wine into new Tamil bottles. The octogenarian Tamil scholar, Swaminatha Aiyar, besides writing the best biography in the language, is now serially publishing his seemingly interminable autobiography. It bids fair to be a Tamil classic. Short stories and skits are being written to-day in very large numbers, thanks to the popularity of journals like *Ananda Vikatan*, *Kalki*, and *Swadeshamitran*. Most of the short stories are either derivative or formless, but some really good stories have been published by Shanker Ram and Kalki. Among modern Tamil poets, Desigavinayagam Pillai and Suddhananda Bharati are the most popular.

The literature of the Telugu people goes back to the eleventh century. In the nineteenth century, the Andhras (the Telugu people) early felt the nascent urge of a new India in the throes of a cultural rebirth. Gurzada Apparao, Rayaprolu Subbarao, and Basavaraju, and, more recently, Krishna Sastri and Satyanarayana, have all proved true to the finest traditions of Telugu poetry. The pioneering efforts of Viresalingam Pantulu laid the foundations of Telugu prose, while the enterprise and the vision of Nageswara Rao Pantulu placed Telugu journalism on a secure base. Telugu fiction, too, seems to be taking big strides since 1920, and Satyanarayana's novel, *Malla Palli*, has had a great vogue in the Andhra Desha. The influence of both English and Bengali has from the first been marked in nascent Telugu literature.

Kannada is more akin to Tamil than to any other Dravidian language. Its literature can claim a considerable measure of

antiquity. Unfortunately, Kannada has been in jeopardy in recent times since an unkind destiny has distributed the Kannada-speaking people among two British provinces and two native states. The renaissance has been, therefore, of more recent origin in Kannada than elsewhere. But during the past two decades the Kannada writers have valiantly triumphed over their adverse circumstances and have produced works that not only give an earnest of the future but also are works of art in their own right. The social dramas of T. P. Kailasam, the short stories of Masti Venkatesa Iyengar, some of the lyrics of Bendre and Puttappa, these are assuredly among the finest flowers of the Indian renaissance. Mention may also be made of Professor B. M. Srikantia's *tour de force*, *Ashwathama*, a Kannada tragedy on the Greek model.

The last member of the Dravidian group is Malayalam, a flourishing literature at the southern extremity of the Indian peninsula. The makers of modern Malayalam literature are Vallathol Narayana Menon, Mahakavi Ulloor Parameshwara Aiyar, G. Sankara Kurup, Nalapat Narayana Menon, Sardar K. M. Panikkar and Murkoth Kumaran. Poetry, criticism, fiction, humorous and expository prose, journalism, all these have been attempted with distinction by modern Malayalam writers. Of the several writers mentioned above, Vallathol is specially famous as the reviver of Kathakali, the extraordinary dance-art of Kerala. Posterity is sure to look upon Vallathol as the centre and the organizing genius of the literary and artistic renaissance in modern Kerala.

Two or three paragraphs may be given here to the contributions of Indians to English literature. Indo-Anglican literature was an offshoot of English education under the Macaulayan dispensation. After several futile attempts Indo-Anglican literature was fairly launched on its interesting career by Toru

Dutt, that "exotic blossom of song" destined too early to be cut off by the envious worm of Death. Her *Sheaf and Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* can be read with undiminished pleasure even to-day. Other early Indo-Anglicans were Romesh Chunder Dutt, whose metrical version of parts of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* is included in the Everyman's Library; Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and Henry Derozio; the talented Ghose brothers, Manmohan and Arobindo; and Nagesh Wishwanath Pai, whose *Angel of Misfortune* is among the longest and best sustained flights of the Indo-Anglican muse.

There is no need here to speak of Rabindranath Tagore, for he is a host in himself. Sarojini Naidu is a lyric poet of a high order; *The Golden Threshold* and its two successors form a fine trilogy of poetic promise and poetic achievement. Of other Indo-Anglican poets, a passing reference may be made to G. K. Chettur, Manjeri Iswaran, Armando Menezes and Baldoon Dhingra. In fiction, the work of writers like Venkataramani, Shanker Ram, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Ahmed Ali has won all-round appreciation in India and in England. Drama has been attempted by, among others, V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar and Fyzee-Rahamin. The autobiographies of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, the critical studies of C. Narayana Menon and Amiya Chakravarty, the light essays of S. V. V. and Bangaruswami and the biographical studies of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri and R. P. Masani, all are creditable contributions to Indo-Anglican literature.

In the fields of political thought, legal exegesis and philosophical speculation, some of the Indo-Anglicans have done very well indeed. Gandhiji's political writings couched in a language Biblical in its simplicity, directness and effectiveness; Jawaharlal Nehru's sensitive and supple intelligence, his

honesty and candour, and his unfailing lucidity in expression, a combination of qualities that makes him one of the finest of modern English prose writers; the urbanity and charm of Srinivasa Sastri's political discourses; the epigrammatic terseness and clarity of S. Srinivasa Iyengar's legal and constitutional expositions; Jadunath Sarkar's monumental scholarship, controlled by his adequate mastery of the English language and stern discipline in expression; Professor S. Radhakrishnan's insight into the Hindu genius that stamps even his casual utterances with the hall-mark of robust wisdom: all these have given something of a standing and a status to Indo-Anglican prose.

If Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu have made notable contributions to Indo-Anglican literature, other women have been equally active in promoting the literary renaissance in the Indian languages as well. Bengali has Kamini Roy, Sarojabala Sen and Hemantabala Dutt; Assamese has Nalinibala Devi and Snehalata Bhattacharya; Hindi has Saraswati Devi and Kamaladevi Chaudhuri; Tamil has Kothainayagi and Kumudini; Malayalam has Balamani Amma and Lalithambika; Kannada has Kalyanamma and Tirumalamma; Marathi has Mukthabhai Dixit and Vibhavari Sirurkar; and Gujarat has Lilavati Munshi. Women are definitely coming into their own, slowly but surely; and they are certain to contribute their due share towards the realization of the new India of the future.

CHAPTER VIII

THESE are some of the writers who have given a new life to the various Indian literatures. Activity has been especially marked since Mahatma Gandhi assumed the leadership of Indian politics a little over twenty years ago. He has largely succeeded in infusing a divine discontent into our literary men and women, and hence of late they have begun to give piercing utterance to the irritations, the disgusts, the humiliations and the insufficiencies that, for the time being at any rate, seem to constitute India's heritage from the immediate past. His battle-cries of non-co-operation, khadi, Harijan uplift, salt satyagraha, and the rest have stirred the imagination of our men of letters. Plays, stories and whole novels have been written hanging on one or more of these national battle-cries.

None the less, the young Indian writer of to-day has not yet solved his fundamental problem. "The call of youth in India is a hot young call, trumpeting down the ages through a maze of polytheistic tribute, and emerging in the twentieth century with some of its original clearness of sound drowned by a Gargantuan thunder of Western drums. The Indian poet of to-day is torn, like the Indian painter, between admiration for Western models and a desire to mould himself thereon, and an inherent Indian tradition that runs in his veins and will not be denied."¹ The message from the West in the years immediately after the war of 1914-1918 was one of general disillusionment amounting almost to despair; the hollow men and the stuffed men and the emancipated men of the "brave new world" but rattled like loose bones in an anatomical cupboard; they gave neither light nor delight—they only moaned the

¹ Gwendoline Godwin, *Modern Indian Poetry* (Wisdom of the East Series) p. 9.

general hurt that humanity had sustained during the terrible war years. Some very adventurous young Indians have tried even to imitate this chaotic spiritual legacy from the war-weary West and to display a similar "vagabond curiosity of matter and tormented unrest of style."¹ Others, a smaller number, have tried to turn their thoughts inward, seeking an ineffable harmony in the secret chambers of their conscious selves. But the antinomy is there, and the present world conflagration has but accentuated the pathos of the human situation, in India as much as elsewhere.

Although Gandhiji's nation-wide "Experiments with Truth" have given present-day Indian writers many a fruitful theme, they have also led to an undesirable development in literature. This excessive preoccupation with politics is no unmixed blessing; it often vulgarizes literature to mere propaganda; humanity is sacrificed on the altar of politics and art is stifled by the necessity to point somehow a political moral. All great literature, even the greatest, is no doubt in a sense moral: in Mr. Middleton Murry's words, literature "is art used for the presentation of the deepest issues of human life. And the deepest issue of all is precisely this question: Does God exist? . . . Is there a harmony in this various, contradictory, and pain-ridden world of ours?" Dante, Shakespeare in his *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, Kalidasa in his *Sakuntala*, Goethe in his *Faust*, Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, all tackle this eternal, this only supreme, question. But when literature is made use of in order to decide whether khadi should be worn or not in preference to mill cloth or whether it is not better for women to avoid maternity homes, then one feels that the currency of literature has been debased and rendered valueless.

It is not that a national struggle for emancipation cannot

¹ George Saintsbury.

be used as suitable subject-matter for a novel: Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is such a novel, and it is among the greatest novels of the world. But so far no Indian writer has been able objectively to portray the tremendous issues involved in the Gandhian technique of satyagraha or in India's burning desire for achieving freedom from foreign domination. Lacking both vision and vitality, the average modern Indian novelist would surrender to a particular policy or mortgage to a political party the special gifts dowered for articulating a wholesome message for all India, for the world itself.

No doubt Indian writers have often benefited by their contact with Western literature and culture. Unfortunately, there is also another side to the shield; many cheap writers have come forward whose sole business is to pander to the lowest tastes by translating some of the morbid productions of the West—Reynold's *Mysteries of the Court of London*, for instance, and its inelegant variations—without the slightest reference to Indian customs or traditions. The sentimental novels and the detective yarns that are published by the dozen are also vulgar travesties of their Western prototypes. People are made to talk and to act as they would never dream of doing in real life; truth is lightly sacrificed for the sake of effect; and plagiarism is practised on a Himalayan scale. Most of the stories that are published are fluid and puerile or they are no more than clever adaptations from Tchekhov or Maupassant or somebody else. The few significant exceptions—all honour to them—only make the background darker.

Indian social life—be it in Hindu or in Mahomedan homes—is fundamentally different from the life that is being lived in Europe. A clever or even a merely honest writer could find in this very circumstance his great opportunity.

! The young novelist *would* portray Indian social life

as either a Katherine Mansfield or a Somerset Maugham has done: the result is often a ridiculous piece of crammed artificiality masquerading as realism. Occasionally, an Indian imitator goes even one better than his original. In a Tamil version of *Philaster*, for instance, the hero marries both the girls who are in love with him: such a dénouement is not impossible in a country which does not yet legally prohibit polygamy. Some of these futile exhibits make one almost despair of the future, but happily there is also a band of really honest writers who value their artistic integrity highly and who refuse to make humiliating compromises with the loud gods of the market-place. One hopes that the authentic few will never allow literature to be overwhelmed by the many fraudulent practitioners of the art.

In recent years another movement has been gradually gaining force which, if not checked in time, is sure to spell disaster to some Indian literatures. I refer, of course, to the subtle serpent yclept variously purism, racialism and communalism. I shall cite one or two examples. For many centuries past, a popular language was current in North India—call it Hindi or Urdu, it hardly matters; both Hindus and Mussalmans enriched this language; it was veritably the lingua franca of North India. During the past twenty years, however, Urdu is being deliberately Persianized and Hindi is being deliberately Sanskritized. In result, there are two languages glaring at each other like angry cats, and neither is the language of the common people. For similar reasons, a living language like Tamil is being atrociously Dravidianized, all popular, and long current Sanskrit terms being replaced by unintelligible and archaic words. This is similar to the comic attempts of the Anglo-Saxon professors of the nineteenth century who tried to eliminate the Latin elements from the

English vocabulary. Those attempts did not succeed; and I earnestly hope that the mad attempts of our purists, racialists and communalists will also be frustrated in time.

While the literary achievements of Indians during the past one hundred years or so are doubtless considerable in bulk and quite distinguished in quality, there is still, as we have seen, no cause for slothful complacency. During the same period, Europe produced an Ibsen, a Hauptmann, a Strindberg, a Shaw, a Hardy, a Pirandello, a Tolstoy, a Dostoevsky, a Turgenev, a Romain Rolland, a Thomas Mann, and literally scores of other distinguished men of letters. We have had, it is true, a Rabindranath Tagore; but his pre-eminence only rudely reminds us of the general bareness of the Indian literary scene when contrasted with that of Europe.

Many of our writers, even some of the most promising, seem to lack the stamina for sustained effort; they produce a good book or two—then comes an inexplicable blank. And yet I am persuaded that, man for man, the average Indian writer is quite the equal of his European contemporary: he thinks as deeply, feels as profoundly and sees as clearly. Why, then, should so many of our writers join the tragic company of the “inheritors of unfulfilled renown”?

Another question may suggest part of the answer. Why do Indian writers with genuine literary gifts rarely win the recognition and the recompense that are their due? It is not only because the wide-spread illiteracy makes our reading public scandalously small—only about one-tenth of our four hundred millions can read. It is also because of the general poverty which puts books in the luxury class, because of the usually unsatisfactory author-publisher relationships, the common condoning of plagiarism, the unattractive get-up of publications, the lack of organization in the book trade, the scarcity

of competent and helpful critics, the generally inadequate compensation for periodical articles—when any compensation at all is given! There are a few honourable exceptions—some of the leading English periodicals: *The Hindu* of Madras, *The Aryan Path* of Bombay, *The New Review* of Calcutta; and a few more English and Indian language journals, but they are oases in the desert.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT about the future? There *is* a future for the Indian literatures, there *must* be: and it is largely in our own hands to make it approximate to our heart's desire.

If we desire the quickening of India's creative pulse, it is essential that more and more young men and women should come forward to enrich the literatures of India or to make serious contributions to knowledge. It is India's tragedy that most of her brilliant young men should seek Government service and thus in most cases be lost to literature altogether. Indian members of the imperial services rarely wish to write books that might prove a positive contribution to literature or to general knowledge; we have had a few notable exceptions—Romesh Chunder Dutt, and, in our own day, A. S. P. Ayyar and A. S. Ray for example—but such exceptions should be more numerous. Likewise, many of the really brilliant people who engage in the professions of Law, Medicine, Politics and Journalism ought to consider it their duty to write serious books of some kind or other. Legal luminaries in India win cases, astound one another, electrify the Bench,

and, in the end, carry their accumulated knowledge to the grave. The task of writing books on the various branches of law is thus often relegated to the lesser lawyer or to the legal hack. India wants more and more people like Mulla and Gour whose legal knowledge does not die with them but is given a permanent form in the shape of legal treatises. Similarly, the best medical practitioners in the country should not only write expositions based on their own unique experiences, but even attempt creative literature in some form or other. The legal and medical practitioners snap humanity at odd angles that are revealed only to them: and the general public would certainly be glad to be taken into their confidence. Genius bloweth where it listeth, and one never knows whether a medical man may not be potentially a poet or a hack journalist, a potential novelist. If activity becomes more widespread and intense than it is now, we are sure to chance upon many more instances of positive literary talent than at present we are able to find.

However we tackle the subject, we come sooner or later to the problem of poverty in India. This unfortunately is at the root of most of the evils that prevail here. It prevents many people from writing; it prevents people also from buying or reading what has been written. It compels many underpaid professors in colleges to waste their scholarship in writing cheap notes and guides and catechisms. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that even many of the professors who are quite well-to-do, with settled salaries and liveried peons, also do little serious work; their cars, their radio sets and their physical ailments become almost their sole pre-occupations in life. Thus, while the poverty of India is one reason, and an important one, it is not the sole reason—something in the Indian atmosphere to-day seems enervating.

It is essential that we should become a new people, a virile people, imbued with the determination to work out our salvation with our own hands; such a determination will make writers and thinkers and men of action of even our fatalists and our lotus-eaters. And that would certainly augur well for India's future, which all of us cherish dearly in our hearts.

On the practical side, certain things require urgently to be done. Each linguistic area should be made to understand what is being done in the other areas in India. This must necessarily lead to a considerable cross-fertilization and provoke the mutual enrichment of the Indian literatures. Already, it must be noted with pleasure and gratitude, the P.E.N. All-India Centre and its official journal are doing very valuable work in projecting before Indians the vision of Indian unity—the unity that triumphantly persists in spite of, or because of, the many languages in our midst. As Shrimati Sophia Wadia remarks, "Ideas unite people and rule the world; not words. Europe is not suffering because it has many languages, but because conflicting ideas and competing ideas have confused issues and have created chaos. Our many languages are channels of cultural enrichment." Moreover, the "P.E.N. Books on the Indian Literatures," of which the first on *Assamese Literature* has already come out, are sure to give all sons and daughters of our country an inspiring bird's-eye view of the variegated Indian literary scene.

It is also necessary to stimulate literary activity in the various linguistic areas by publishing satisfactory translations of the classics both from the other Indian literatures and from European, Chinese, Japanese and other foreign literatures. The institution of annual prizes, medals and foundation lectures on a linguistic as well as on an all-India basis is also likely to prove an incentive to the production of good literature.

Further, exhibitions of books should be organized from time to time in order to foster the book-buying habit and to encourage enterprising publishers to produce "Books Beautiful." The institution of an Indian Academy of Letters, federating the various Sahitya Parishads, might also serve as the focal point of the Indian renaissance, emphasizing the unity and the vitality of Indian culture.

This above all we require: Faith; Faith in our future. Without it our writers will only echo the groans of a suffering world, not give it spiritual comfort. Chaos looms ahead, vast and portentous. We need not look through literary lenses to discern its all-too-patent threat. The writer's, and especially, perhaps, the poet's mission, is to arm our spirit against whatever disaster may impend, to find the grounds for hope, to teach mankind compassion, to serve as the delicate stethoscope that will help us to bear, however faintly, however intermittently, the heart-beats of a cosmic harmony.

Let me conclude this essay with these wise words of our great Rabindranath Tagore:—

A poet's mission is to attract the voice which is yet inaudible in the air; to inspire faith in the dream which is unfulfilled; to bring the earliest tidings of the unborn flower to a sceptic world.

So many are there to-day who do not believe. They do not know that faith in a great future itself creates that future; that without faith you cannot recognize your opportunities, which come again and again, but depart unheeded. Prudent men and unbelievers have created dissensions, but it is the eternal child, the dreamer, the man of simple faith, who has built up great civilizations.

Belgaum, 27th October, 1941.



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